Missionary Accommodation

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A Study of its History, Theology and Present Need.

by

Gustav Voss, S.J.

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Volume 4, Number 2

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Missionary Accommodation

A STUDY OF ITS HISTORY, THEOLOGY AND PRESENT NEED

By

GUSTAV VOSS, S.J.

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1.

Introduction

1. In fulfilling the command of Christ to teach all nations, Christianity comes face to face with a great many peoples and nations of different character, racial peculiarities, and cultural traditions. A world-religion's mission is to reach and conquer not just each individual soul, but each people, race, and nation, and to transform and mould it into a new redeemed humanity, united to God and united in itself through the Life and Truth of Christ.[1]

2. It is always a difficult undertaking to plant a delicate seedling under foreign heavens and in foreign soil, to make it take root and grow into a strong and healthy tree. The resourceful gardener will first examine the soil, observe the climatic conditions, and guided by the knowledge of his careful investigation he will cooperate with nature and, rather than force the growing plant into a pre-meditated shape, he will let it adapt itself in unhindered growth to the landscape in which he has placed it.

3. Much more difficult it is to plant the seed of faith in foreign ground. Here the soil is the soul of man, of the individual as well as of the foreign people or nation as a whole. Like the gardener, so too the herald of the Gospel will study his surroundings and local conditions and will call on everything that will facilitate his work. He will adapt himself to the genius of the people, will speak to them in their own language, will try to grasp and understand the national and racial peculiarities, will respect and preserve all that is good and of value, and will thus make sure that Christianity will not be a strange and outlandish growth, but will in due time become native to the soil of its adoption.

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1. The present study is based to a large extent on a former article by the present writer, "Missionary Accommodation and Ancestral Rites in the Far East," *Theological Studies*, IV (1943), 525-560. With the permission of the editor, large sections have been incorporated in the present study. In discussing the history of accommodation, I follow for the most part, where no other references are given, the excellent monograph by Alfons Väth, S.J., *Das Bild der Weltkirche. Akkommodation und Europäismus im Wandel der Jahrhunderte und in der neuen Zeit* (Hannover: Giesel, 1932).

4. This sympathetic attitude of the missionary, his careful, prudent course of action, his forbearance with, and assimilating of, native-born manners, customs, and traditions, and his building wherever possible the external forms of Christian life and worship into the cultural life of the missionary people, all this we comprehend under the term of accommodation. Its purpose is to pave the way for the acceptance of Christianity and to fashion it into an indigenous, home-grown religion.

5. This accommodation will therefore manifest itself in the recognition of, and respect for, racial and national peculiarities which, in so far as they are not of an ethico-religious or pagan nature, are tolerated by the Church and even adopted. It is an all-welcoming spirit and a definitely affirmative attitude towards all that is "natural, genuine, and incorrupt in the pre-Christian and non-Christian world."[2] The birth and flowering of our European Christian culture is the fruit of this spirit of accommodation that flows from the very essence of Christianity as a universal religion sent to all nations. Mindful of this world-wide mission, epitomized in St. Paul's imperative injunction to be "all things to all men" (I Cor. 9:22), the Church during the periods of her greatest missionary success has always practised this accommodation as a most important missionary technique.

2.
The History of Accommodation

6. This all-embracing attitude of Christianity has not always found the attention it deserves. Yet it is an historical fact that the course of Christian missions was strongly influenced by this spirit of accommodation, and, moreover, it seems certain that the future development in the mission fields will depend to a great extent on a prudent, yet liberal, use of this once so success-

2. K. Adam, *The Spirit of Catholicism*, trans. Dom Justin McCann (New York: Macmillan, 1929), p. 157.

ful missionary technique. In the following a few highlights of the history of accommodation may therefore briefly be summarized.

The Early Christian Mission

7. Accommodation was practised as early as the time of the Apostles. St. Paul himself provided the classical example when he refused to force upon the Gentiles the unbearable yoke of the Old Law (Acts 15:28f.). Thanks to him and to the Apostolic Council of Jerusalem, the danger of a Judaizing of Christianity was averted and Christ's supranational catholic missionary designs, the authentic character of the Christian missions, emerged triumphant. Paul's whole teaching and methods of presentation are characterized by a liberal spirit of accommodation. Only little by little did he introduce "his little ones in Christ" to the fullness of the doctrine by feeding them "with milk, not with solid food, for you were not yet ready for it" (I Cor. 3:2), just as Christ only gradually had revealed Himself and His purposes and the doctrine of the Cross to His disciples. Paul was adamant in his insistence upon admitting the Gentiles into the Church without circumcision. And yet, "though loudly declaring and writing that circumcision made with hands profits nothing, Paul himself, in his desire to be all things to all men, circumcised Timothy."[3] In these words Clement of Alexandria acknowledges the sound pedagogy of Paul's accommodation.

8. Another remarkable instance of Pauline accommodation is found in his sermon at Athens.

> Instead of uttering any invective against their Polytheism, he began a discourse upon the Unity of the Divine Nature; and then proceeded to claim the altar, consecrated in the neighborhood to the unknown God, as the property of Him whom he preached to them, and to enforce his doctrine of the Divine Immateriality, not by miracles, but by argu-

3. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 7/9.

ment, and that founded on the words of a heathen poet.[4]

St. Paul's example was followed and further developed by the early Apologists and Church Fathers. It was from the contemporary literature of their times and even from pagan philosophy that they borrowed the intellectual weapons for the exposition and defense of Catholic teaching.

9. There was first of all the important question of terminology. It was the sacred duty of the Church to teach and propagate the Word of God. To do so, she had to express the revealed truths in human concepts and images. These she did not create, or only rarely so. She was at pains to explain the unfamiliar with the help of the familiar. Because of her world-wide mission, however, the Church retained but few words which bespoke her Jewish origin, like *hosanna, alleluja, amen.* She rather turned, as might be expected, to the familiar terms and expressions of Greek and Latin literature. Again, St. Paul had shown the way by using words like *soteria, mysterion, psychikos, eulogia,* and others, which were common household words in the language of the mystery religions.

10. Following in his footsteps, the early Christian writers soon adopted into the Christian vocabulary terms like *hostia, sacrificium, immolare, sacramentum,* and the like, and even such familiar words as soul, sin, redemption, asceticism, and many others. That these expressions, taken over from the secular and religious pagan literature, signified in their pagan context something altogether different from the Christian concept was no unsurmountable obstacle. The non-Christian words were simply, by a process of definition and education, emptied of their pagan content and filled with the new Christian meaning.

11. The Greek *theos,* for instance, and the Latin *deus,* which originally suggested a plurality of gods and goddesses, were now elevated to express the monotheistic concept of the Godhead, the one true God of the Jewish and Christian revelation. The

4. J. H. Newman, *The Arians of the Fourth Century* (3rd ed.; London: Lumely, 1871), p. 67.

process of thus purifying pre-existing terms of their pagan connotations and filling them with a new conceptional content, must have been slow and painful. But without these terms, which were well known and familiar to the average reader, the Christian writings would not have been understood and would probably have found little or no response.

12. The contemporary philosophy was likewise pressed into the service of the missionary conquest of the Roman and Hellenistic world. In Stoicism, and above all neo-Platonism, the early Apologists saw many elements of truth, and these they used to represent Christianity not as having come to destroy but to fulfill.

> It is not surprising to encounter Plato or at any rate his successors, disciples and friends of the neo-Platonic school, not only in the forecourts of Christianity, but right in its mysteries, in the trinitarian and christological speculations. It was especially in the spirit of Origen and St. Augustine that Plato seemed to have a Christian rebirth.[5]

13. We must admit that Origen went at times too far, but had the Church followed Tertullian and the Montanists who strongly opposed the policy of assimilation and advocated isolation, she would, naturally speaking, have remained an insignificant sect doomed to sterility and eventual extinction. The fate of the Montanists themselves is eloquent.[6] Fortunately, the Church as a whole understood better than did Tertullian the parable of the leaven and the mustard seed, as can be seen from the later development.

> When later at the opening of the twelfth century the mind of the West began to turn towards Aristotle, and the approaching forces of the monistically-minded Aristotelianism threatened western thought, Thomas Aquinas appeared, the gifted pupil of a great master. By combining Aristotelianism with the most essential elements of Platonic thought and adjusting it to Chris-

5. K. Adam, *Christ and the Western Mind*, trans. E. Bullough (London: Sheed and Ward, 1930), p. 12.
6. Cf. G. Schnürer, *Kirche und Kultur im Mittelalter* (Paderborn, 1924), I, 4.

> tian truths, he brought it into the service of the Cross of Christ. Despite all opposition he pressed the intellectual weapons of Aristotelianism so completely into Christ's service that even today the theologian can hardly move a step without keeping his eye fixed on St. Thomas and the Philosopher of Stagira.[7]

14. This adaptation to, and absorption of, human wisdom played an indispensable role in the development of Christian teaching. Not less conspicuous is the accommodation to popular customs and long-standing practices and their adoption into the external forms of Christian worship. "The rulers of the Church from early times," writes Cardinal Newman, "were prepared, should the occasion arise, to adopt, or imitate, or sanction the existing rites and customs of the populace."[8] Certain writers have been scandalized at this. Others seem to prefer not to mention it. Not so Newman.

> The use of temples, and these dedicated to particular saints, and ornamented on occasions with branches of trees; incense, lamps, and candles; votive offerings on recovery from illness; holy water; asylums; holydays and seasons, use of calendars, processions, blessings on the fields; sacerdotal vestments, the tonsure, the ring in marriage, turning to the East, images at a later date, perhaps the ecclesiastical chant, and the Kyrie Eleison, are all of pagan origin, and sanctified by their adoption into the Church.[9]

15. To take these customs and symbols out of their pagan setting and admit them into the sphere of liturgical and extra-liturgical worship is no more strange or wonderful than to take words out of their pagan context and give them a new Christian meaning. This the Church did,

> . . . confiding in the power of Christianity to resist the infection of evil, and to transmute the very instruments and appendages of demon-worship to an evan-

---

7. K. Adam, *loc. cit.*

8. J. H. Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (16th. impr.; London: Longmans, 1920), p. 372.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 373.

> gelical use, and feeling also that these usages had originally come from primitive revelations and from the instinct of nature, though they had been corrupted; and that they must invent what they needed, if they did not use what they found. . . .[10]

16. Hand in hand with the growth of the Christian liturgy went the development of a new Christian art. Art in itself is neither pagan nor Christian, but becomes one or the other in accordance with the inspiration guiding it. In Greece and Rome Christianity found an art that had reached a marvelous height of perfection, and there was little need to do more than make use of what already existed, purifying it where necessary from its dross of former idolatrous connections. The artists, consequently, employed not only the technique used in the schools of art of their times, but they also adopted and adapted a great part of the symbolism from traditional contexts.

17. No difficulties arose from such symbols as the dove and the lamb, the festoons of flowers and vines of grape, the palm of victory, the phoenix of immortality, the olive branch of peace. Some of these symbols may have been of Jewish provenance, but in the time in question they were part and parcel of Graeco-Roman symbolic art. In the pagan these designs awakened earthly thoughts; the Christian they were apt to lead—again by a process of suggestion and education—to things spiritual and divine. But the artists went even further. They were not afraid of using at times also mythological themes. Orpheus was made to appear as the Good Shepherd, and it is not improbable that the fish appearing constantly in the art of the catacombs as a symbol of the Eucharist was borrowed from certain ancient pagan sacrifices.[11] Thus Christianity preserved for us and rejuvenated the ancient art of Greece and Rome by breathing into it a new soul and the glowing fire of its own interior life.

18. Gradually the Church thus fitted herself into the cultural pattern of the Roman empire. She rejected only what was intrinsically and irremediably evil, adopted and preserved what-

10. *Ibid.*, p. 371.
11. A. Väth, *op. cit.*, pp. 13f.

ever was good, transformed and adapted whatever was indifferent. It was cultural accommodation carried to its highest point.

The Medieval Mission

19. In the following centuries, this principle of cultural adaptation played a less conspicuous role. Christianity, on the one hand, encountered civilizations and cultures that were greatly inferior to that of Rome. On the other hand, Christianity itself was no longer simply an undeveloped seed. The Church had grown to maturity, and in this growth her government and her social and juridical life had been shaped after the pattern of the Roman state. She had incorporated much that was of lasting value in the old cultures. It would have been disadvantageous, if not impossible to renounce these cultural forms she had inherited.

> It could not have entered the minds of the heralds of the Faith to deprive Christianity of its distinguished and resplendent cultural garb and clothe it in the poor wrappings of the Germanic culture, or to substitute for Roman law the ancient German folk law, or to prefer in liturgy and theology the dialect of Bavaria to the tongue of Cicero, or to put off the noble Roman vestments in favor of the bearskins.[12]

20. A certain amount of Romanization, as we might call it, was therefore inevitable and even desirable as part of the civilizing mission which Christianity by Divine Providence was called upon to carry out. Still, even in evangelizing and civilizing the barbaric north, the Church did not altogether abandon her principles of missionary accommodation.

21. This is borne out by the achievements of St. Patrick in Ireland, St. Augustine in England, and St. Boniface in Germany. Mindful of the strong patriarchal and social ties of the old clan-system with all its loyalties and duties, these missionaries directed their efforts almost always first to the heads or leaders of tribes and to rulers of kingdoms in the hope of winning the masses through their example and assistance. They spoke, of course, the lan-

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 22f.

guage of the country. And the early monks adopted the dress of the druids and even their tonsure: their hair was allowed to grow long in the back, but in the front it was shaped except for a half crown. Sacred springs and hallowed groves, giant oaks and pagan temples were given a Christian significance and thus found a place in the new Christian life and worship.[13]

22. Famous in this regard is the well-known instruction of Pope Gregory the Great on the missionary methods to be used in the conversion of England. He wrote to Abbot Mellitus, a fellow missionary of St. Augustine of Canterbury:

> Tell Augustine that he should not destroy the temples of the gods but rather the idols within those temples. Let him, after he has purified them with holy water, place altars and relics of the Saints therein. For if those temples are well built, there is no reason why they should not be converted from the worship of demons to the service of the true God. The people, seeing that their places of worship are not destroyed, will more readily banish error from their hearts, acknowledge and adore the true God, because they come to places familiar and dear to them.
>
> Further, since it has been their custom to slaughter oxen in sacrifice to the demons, they should receive some solemnity in exchange. Let them, therefore, on the day of the dedication of their churches, or on the feast of the martyrs whose relics are preserved in them, build themselves huts around their one-time temples and celebrate the occasion with religious feasting. They will sacrifice and eat the animals not any more as an offering to the devil, but for the glory of God to whom they will give thanks as the giver of all things. Thus, if they are not deprived of all the external pleasures, they will grasp more readily the interior joys of their new faith. For it is quite impossible to efface all at once everything pagan from their stubborn minds, just as it is impossible to climb a mountain by leaps and bounds instead of step by step. . . .

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 25f.

> Mention this then to Our brother the Bishop, that he may dispose of the matter as he sees fit according to the conditions of time and place.[14]

23. This instruction, the Magna Charta of true missionary accommodation, is a practical combination of sound psychology, tolerance, and firmness. It is not an isolated instance. Asked by St. Augustine which liturgical rite he should use in England, the same Gregory advised him to choose from the Roman, Gallic, or any other liturgy, what he deemed best and most edifying. This he should offer to the Angles like a bouquet of exquisite flowers.[15]

24. In this connection it must be pointed out, however, that the Church did not deliberately take over pagan practices. Rather, the people were allowed to continue certain of their time-honored customs, and the Church tolerated these so that in time the pagan significance was forgotten.

25. In Germany, too, many pagan customs and traditions were retained, especially in connection with a number of Christian festivals. The feast of John the Baptist, for instance, was surrounded by customs that had been in use in the older Summer Solstice. Big fires were lighted at night, and young and old celebrated by dancing around and jumping over the leaping flames. The veneration of St. Michael, the conqueror of Lucifer, and of St. Martin, the intrepid warrior of Tours, was instituted as a substitute or antidote to the popular cult of Woden. The Martinmas goose and the giving of gifts on St. Martin's day are relics of pre-Christian customs; so are the Christmas tree and its candle lights, the Easter fire and Easter rabbit, the carnival masquerade and the blessing of herbs on the feast of the Assumption, and many, many others. It must have taken generations before the pagan associations had been banished from the minds of the people, and before these customs had taken on an exclusive Christian significance. The Church, we know, fought for centuries against the many superstitions that were inevitably bound

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14. Ven. Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* etc., I, 30 (ed. Plummer, Exford: Clarendon Press, 1896, I, 64ff.).

15. Gregorii M., Epp., I, 11, ep. 64. Cf. Migne, *PL*, 77/1187.

up with these one-time pagan practices. They, nevertheless, helped the Church to become "at home" in Germany, and Germany to become "at home" in the Church.

26. Other instances to prove that this spirit of accommodation has been practiced throughout the whole period of ancient and medieval missionary expansion could be easily adduced. "The Church," remarks a French writer, "treated the soul of the barbarians as a wild sapling full of sap and vigor, on which it merely grafted the elements of a purer life, leaving to time and toil the completion of the work."[16] The results we find today speak for themselves. While losing none of its divine universality, Catholicism in Italy, we observe, is none the less Italian; in France it is French, in Ireland, Irish; in the eastern nations of Europe, Slavic. Even to the casual observer these different national traits in European Catholicism are plainly visible, in spite of the fact that the racial and cultural differences between European nations are not too pronounced.

27. During those early centuries, the Church never set up a barrier against any culture, against any legitimate custom or practice that had grown up from the native soil. She was always at pains to adapt herself to the particular genius of the nation she evangelized. Not only did she not oppress national and racial characteristics, but she nursed and fostered them, convinced "that every genuine value, everything that comes from pure and uncorrupted nature, belongs to God and has citizen rights in His kingdom."[17] Thus grew the Church, an all-embracing Catholicism, world-wide and yet at home in each nation.

28. The final product of the Christianizing of Europe, in terms of cultural achievement, was a civilization which was neither Jewish nor Roman, neither Gallic nor Germanic. It was Occidental-European or Western and, at the same time, radically Christian. The Church had successfully woven Christianity into the very fabric of Western culture and had made it the mistress and teacher of Western society, the wellspring of its religious beliefs,

16. G. Kurth, *Les Origin de la civilisation moderne*, II, 34, as quoted by F. Mourret, *A History of the Catholic Church*, trans. N. Thompson (St. Louis: Herder, 1936), III, 194.
17. K. Adam, *The Spirit of Catholicism*, p. 158.

social ideals, and moral unity, the main source from which, directly or indirectly, the spiritual dynamic of Western culture and civilization has been drawn. "It was in Christ that the West found its true unity, more intimate and more subtle than all the ties of blood, stronger and more lasting than any unity imposed by common fate: the unity of the same faith and the same worship."[18]

29. It has been argued that all this was achieved by a process of civilization, not of accommodation. The Church, we gladly hold and defend, did civilize Europe, especially the Europe of the barbarian tribes, and even the "Roman Imperium." For first of all, the action of the truth and morality of Christ upon the minds and lives of men does bring with it a certain common mental and moral, social and at times even material elevation among the peoples upon whom it is exercised. And secondly, while it may be hard to draw the line between civilization and culture, it is definitely clear that the civilizing effects of Christianity operated not apart from, not by destruction of, but through and with the peculiar social structure in each people which we call its typical culture. Thus while endowing the barbarian peoples of the West of Europe with the treasures she had appropriated from Jerusalem, Athens, and Rome, the Church at the same time utilized to the full a great many of their cultural institutions, developed their potential factors for good, added to them, and ennobled them by communicating to them her principles, her spirit, and her wisdom. She diffused her life by means of their own culture and in terms of it.

30. Thus the Church gave much, but in return received not a little. The culture which she had nursed and brought to maturity had in turn stamped her with its own indelible seal, for the Church in adapting herself to the cultural setting of Europe had adopted many of the best elements developed in the long history of Occidental civilization. She had clothed herself in the cultural garb of the West she herself had helped to weave, and she would bear, henceforth, a marked Western coloring.

18. K. Adam, *Christ and the Western Mind*, p. 12; cf. also Chr. Dawson, *Progress and Religion* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1931), p. 234.

31. During these years that saw the Christianizing of Northern Europe, the early Franciscans and Dominicans were not forgetful of the principles of accommodation in their missionary effort abroad. Special colleges for the teaching of languages were established by them to serve for the linguistic training of the prospective missionaries. The Dominican Raymond of Penafort (died 1275) founded colleges in Murcia and Tunis, while the Franciscan Raymond Lully (died 1315) established several Oriental schools at Majorca, Bologna, Oxford, and Paris. These institutions also taught mission theory and methods. Lully, "whose whole life was devoted to the study of the practical and theoretical aspects of the missions, and who first expressed the necessity of an Institute of Propaganda, wrote a series of treatises or memorials dealing with the mission theory."[19] These are among the first works to mark the origin of the literature on missiology.

32. In China the Franciscan John of Montecorvino (died 1328) followed a similar course. He translated the Psalms and the New Testament into the vernacular and preached in the Tartar language in the mosques and even in pagan temples. The two churches which he built in Peking he decorated with pictures of Old and New Testament scenes. But his most astonishing "innovation" was the use of the Tartar language in the celebration of Holy Mass. The conversion of a certain Mongol noble, Prince George, who was in all probability a convert from Nestorianism, seems to have suggested this course of action. Following the practice of the missions in the Near East among the schismatics, who were allowed to retain their ancient rites, Friar John felt justified to give his neophytes a liturgy that would closely conform to their religious traditions. It must be pointed out, however, that he always kept the Latin rite.

33. The question as to when and where John obtained the faculties for adopting Tartar as the liturgical language is still undecided. In our lack of positive evidence it may be safe to state that John, in his capacity as Papal Legate, had obtained all the neces-

19. Joseph Schmidlin, *Catholic Mission Theory* (Techny: Mission Press, S.V.D., 1931), p. 11: also p. 201.

sary indults. In the Middle Ages, the Holy See had granted the Mendicant Orders who carried on missionary work in the Near East extensive faculties and privileges, and the ecclesiastical regulations were less stringent and definite than those of our own days. At any rate, the Tartar liturgy, as we might call it, was short lived. But although it had completely vanished from the Chinese soil at the beginning of the Ming dynasty (1368), Friar John of Montecorvino, the first Archbishop of Peking, rightly deserves the name as one of the greatest pioneers of the Faith.[20]

The Period of European Expansion

34. At the close of the Middle Ages, the Church thus stood before the non-Christian world an imposing and magnificent, but typically Western, religion. It was desirable and quite in accord with her cultural mission that she should communicate to others the good she had received. There was room in the subsequent missionary conquest for sound Europeanism, just as there had been room for sound Romanism in the Christianizing of Northern Europe. But the "romanization" of the North, we must remember, had been accompanied, tempered, and made successful by an intelligent and sympathetic policy of accommodation. With the dawn of European expansion and colonial conquest, this policy in many places was largely forgotten. It was superseded in the missionary field by a narrow and often unsympathetic form of Europeanism.

35. The Europe of the age of discoveries had little or no respect for the non-European peoples. Its soldiers and merchants went abroad in search of new territories, wealth and fame. They knew and cared for little beyond their own fortunes. Eminently fitted for conquest, these *conquistadores* were ill adapted to understand an alien civilization and to appreciate its inherent values. Foreign cultures to them were crude and barbarous, their religions pure superstition and idolatry, and even the good they contained and the natural virtues found in them were despised as the work of the devil.

20. Van den Wyngaert, *Notes sur Jean de Mont Corvin* (Lille: 1924), pp. 33ff.; the same, *Sinica Franciscana* (Quarachi: 1929), p. 350, Dom. Gueranger, *Institutions Liturgiques*, vol. III (Paris: 1851), pp. 121f.

36. The missionaries had, quite naturally, allied themselves with, or followed closely in the path of, this colonial conquest, so much so that they were not infrequently accused of being the forerunners of the merchants and colonists. They were suspected at times of being foreign agents who had come to prepare the way for military conquest. This accusation is not altogether unfounded. We know of instances where individual missionaries and even Christian countries have had the spread of their earthly kingdom more at heart than the expansion of the Kingdom of Christ. We do not want to discuss the value of the close association between the missionary work and the colonizing efforts of Europe. The missions benefited by it; but they also suffered.

37. They suffered even more from the fact that the missionaries—true children of their times—shared the intolerant and prejudiced views of the *conquistadores* on the native cultures and religions. Moreover, imbued as they were with the militant zeal of the ancient crusaders, the thought of accommodation and adaptation could hardly enter their minds. They were unaware of the genuine religious value to be found even in heathenism, ignorant of the sentimental and emotional values bound up with its beliefs and rituals, and equally ignorant of the social structure and racial and psychological peculiarities of their new charges.

38. Guided by a humanly understandable, yet utterly unjust, superiority complex, they strove to suppress and uproot not only heathen beliefs, but even their cultural traditions, which were at variance with the enlightened achievements of Renaissance Europe. The result was that the pagan of whatever tribe or origin was expected to become, to all intents and purposes, a Westerner before he was deemed worthy of becoming a Christian. Hence any prospective convert, whether savage or highly cultured Brahmin, had to accept Christianity in its European, or rather Spanish-Portuguese, coinage and color.

39. Some of the instructions and directives of the local councils of Goa may illustrate the above. They are representative, on the whole, also of the policy that guided the missionary work in the Americas. These councils authorized the demolition of all idols

and pagan institutions. Non-Catholics were not allowed any public exercise of religion, and in cities, which they inhabited jointly with Europeans, certain districts were closed to them. Pagans were excluded from public offices, and at times, as an inducement to conversion, special taxes were imposed on them. Children whose pagan father had died became "orphans of the state," even though their mother might still be alive; if they had not yet reached the age of reason, they were baptized; the others were given a Christian guardian and were allowed to choose their own religion once they reached the age of fourteen. The caste system was suppressed, and the use of the Brahmin cord was forbidden.[21] No wonder that especially the ruling and educated classes were turned against Christianity and that any real progress was retarded.

40. Europeanism may thus be called the prominent characteristic of the age. Some might be inclined to condemn it outright, but we must keep in mind that the cultural content of the missionary peoples and tribes was, with few exceptions, rather low. Spain and Portugal dispensed to them of the riches of which they were rightly proud, and the fact that they transferred their own Catholic culture to their respective mission fields is perhaps no more to be condemned than the transferring of a Roman culture to Northern Europe. Nor may we judge past events in the light of present-day conditions. Besides, they did practise, in spite of all Europeanism, a considerable amount of accommodation, especially among the native tribes in Latin America and the Philippines who were not in the immediate sphere of colonial centers. Europeanism flourished in the "colonial church," not in the "missionary church." But during this same period of history, a new attempt was made on a much wider scale to take account of the legitimate cultural aspirations of the missionary peoples by Robert de Nobili in India and Matteo Ricci in China.

41. De Nobili (died 1656) soon realized that the open contempt for native customs was the main reason for the lack of success. To remedy the situation he studied the native dialects, adop-

21. Cf. the decrees of the five councils of Goa, 1567, 1575, 1585, 1592, and 1606, in *Bullarium Patronatus Portugalliae*, Appendix I.

ted the dress of the noble Brahmins, subjected himself to their mode of life, and succeeded in penetrating far into the inner world of Hindu thought. Adjusting his demands, as nearly as he could, to national prejudices, he distinguished three types of native customs and practices, those that were absolutely incompatible with Christianity (such as the worship of idols and polygamy), those that were politico-social (as the caste system, the girdle and the tuft of hair as a sign of nobility or office), and those that were of a mixed nature. These latter he sought to divest of their pagan character and to transform them into Christian practices. His methods were sound in principle and proved successful.

> He unquestionably stands out as a noble and exalted figure, in so far as we may venture a psychological judgment on him. Inspired by the purest missionary ideals, subordinating all means to the one great goal, and uniting prudence with an inventive love, he ranks as a star of the first magnitude in the firmament of mission history, despite the errors which he may have made. . . .[22]

42. Matteo Ricci (died 1610) followed a very similar pattern in China. Faced with the difficult task of preaching the Gospel to a nation that considered itself the very center of the universe and that was rightly proud of its highly developed civilization, it seemed to him well-nigh impossible to make the Chinese accept Christianity as long as it appeared as a foreign religion, preached, moreover, by foreigners. Hence Ricci set himself the task of finding in Chinese thought and philosophy a natural basis upon which the supernatural structure of Christianity might be built so that a new Christian, yet Chinese, civilization would be the natural outcome.

43. From a careful investigation of Chinese literature, philosophy, and religion, Ricci came to the conclusion that, whereas Buddhism and Taoism were outright idolatry, Confucianism was

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22. J. Schmidlin, *Catholic Mission History* (Techny: Mission Press, S. V. D., 1931), p. 304. Regarding the Malabar Rites, cf. M. P. Harney, S.J., "Early Portuguese Missions," *The Missionary Academia*, III (1945-46), No. 2, pp. 21-25.

23. For the Chinese Rites, cf. Pastor *History of the Popes*, trans. Dom Ernest Graf, O.S.B. (St. Louis: Herder, 1941), XXXIII, 393-490; Schmidlin, *Mission History*, pp. 474, 478-83.

not a real religion, but rather a system of ethics and, particularly in its classical form, in harmony with many tenets of Christianity, and he felt justified in using the ancient lore of Confucius as a stepping stone for the preaching of the Gospel. But Ricci went still further. Just as the Church did not hesitate in apostolic times to use Greek *theos* and Latin *deus* to designate the one true God, Ricci was in favor of adopting certain Chinese terms, namely *Shang-ti* (Supreme Lord) and *T'ien* (Heaven), which the Chinese canonical books in his estimation undoubtedly applied to the Supreme Being. And just as the early Church had accommodated herself to civic and social institutions in Europe, Ricci was willing to make wide allowances for certain rites and ceremonies in honor of Confucius and the ancestors. Convinced that the Confucian rites had no religious significance whatsoever either in their institution or in their practice as exercised by the enlightened classes, and that those in honor of the dead—although extremely suggestive in their ritual—were nevertheless probably not superstitious, Ricci and his successors allowed their converts to continue them on condition that every superstitious element was eliminated.

44. There were a great many other "concessions." The Jesuits asked for and obtained permission to celebrate Mass with Chinese as the liturgical language, a permission, however, which created a great deal of discussion and was never put in practice. The administration to women of the Sacraments of Baptism and Extreme Unction presented a serious problem in so far as the Chinese code of etiquette made it impossible to touch a woman, were it ever so lightly. The anointing required by the Ritual for both Sacraments was apt to create a real scandal. Hence permission was asked from Rome and obtained to omit such ceremonies in baptism, and to administer the Sacrament of Extreme Unction only to women who asked for it, and even to forego the administration of this Sacrament altogether if by dispensing it the work of the mission would be endangered. Again, annual Confession and Sunday Mass could not be demanded owing to the lack of priests, whilst the Sunday rest could not be observed by

the common people because of their pagan employers, and not by officials because their duty required their attendance at the court and the tribunals.

45. The above incidents will suffice to exemplify the spirit of accommodation as practised by Ricci and many of his fellow missionaries. But it would be wrong to think of them only as advocates of liberal missionary accommodation, for they were at the same time worthy and most successful representatives of a far-reaching but sound Europeanism.[24] In their effort to impress the Chinese intelligentsia the Jesuits became mathematicians and geographers, cartographers and court astronomers, makers of guns and clocks, artists and prolific writers, in brief, heralds and interpreters of European Christian culture, whose "civilizing apostolate," however, was wisely tempered by their readiness to adapt themselves to Chinese manners and customs, social institutions and cultural traditions.

46. This sketchy summary of some of the more important steps taken by Ricci and his successors does not imply that their methods were altogether sound, or that they could not, in the long run, have endangered some of the foundations of the Chinese mission. We have contented ourselves with pointing out some of the prominent features that might have been important in the later development of the missionary activities in China. Rome, as is well known, declared certain practices of accommodation in India and China, especially the use of *T'ien* and *Shang-ti* and several forms of the Confucian and ancestor worship, inadmissible.[25] It based its judgment on reports received from Jesuit and non-Jesuit missionaries and on the findings of special legates who were sent to investigate the complex question. Although a number of practices were allowed to continue, the Roman decision served for a long time as an effective deterrent against further attempts at such accommodation.

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24. Huh Shih, *The Chinese Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934), p. 28.

25. Cf. the Apostolic Constitution, *Ex Quo Singulari*, issued by Benedict XIV in 1742, and his constitution *Omnium Solicitudinem*, issued in 1744. This was Rome's final answer to a long drawn-out controversy.

A Turning Point in Mission History

47. Recent years have seen a most significant change in the missionary development of the Far East, and it is significant that this change should have been occasioned by the very same difficulties that beset Ricci and his companions. A number of new decrees, issued between 1935 and 1940, now admit the permissibility of certain rites and ceremonies that are (or were) connected with the cult of Confucius, with certain ancestral rites, and with the recently abolished State Shintoism.

48. The first of these decrees, issued in 1935, was prompted by the revival of the cult of Confucius in the newly created Japanese puppet state of Manchuria, or Manchukuo as it was then called. On stated occasions the citizens, especially the school children, soldiers, and civil officials, regardless of their religious affiliation, were expected and, at times, commanded to take part in certain civil functions which included Confucian rites. The government was adamant in its demand that the citizens participate in these ceremonies and quite outspoken as to their non-religious character:

> Confucius condensed the teaching of the ancient sages and proposed the royal doctrine, *wang-tao*. His teachings are the basis of our individual, family, and State morality. They are a sure guide for all those who assume the charge of governing peoples. Manchukuo has adopted this "royal doctrine" as the principle of its government. All citizens must, therefore, participate in the ceremonies in honor of Confucius and thus show that they are animated by a loyal sincere patriotism.[26]

49. In view of this official announcement, the faithful were allowed to take part in these rites to fulfill their patriotic duty. In case some of the ceremonies were judged to have preserved a certain religious significance, a proximate, but merely material, cooperation could for a grave reason be tolerated, provided there was no danger of scandal. This norm of action, needless to say, was

26. Cf. *Periodica*, XXVI (1937), 87-97.

in perfect agreement with the principles of moral theology that govern the *communicatio in sacris* (CIC, c.1258).

50. This new and significant regulation was followed, in 1936, by an instruction of Propaganda addressed to the Apostolic Delegate of Japan. The situation in Japan was, in a way, similar to that in Manchukuo, with this difference, that the ceremonies in question were connected not with the cult of Confucius but with State Shintoism, and that they created even more serious difficulties for individual Catholics as also for the whole Church in Japan. Again the State authorities made the first move towards disentangling the knotty problem by declaring that the attendance at such functions was to be looked upon merely as a civic manifestation of gratitude and patriotism. The aforementioned instruction of Propaganda consequently declared that

> . . . there is question here of those acts which, although originating in non-Christian religious sources, are not intrinsically evil but of themselves indifferent; neither are they commanded as a profession of a religion but only as civil acts for the manifestation and encouragement of patriotism, with all intention removed of forcing either Catholics or non-Catholics to signify adhesion to religions from which these rites have sprung.
>
> . . . The civil authorities and the common estimation of cultured persons attribute to the ceremonies held at the National Shrines *(Jinja)* a mere civil signification of patriotism; namely, a meaning of filial reverence toward the Imperial Family and to the heroes of the country. Therefore, since rites of this kind are endowed with a purely civil value, it is lawful for Catholics to join in them and act in accord with the other citizens after having made known their intentions, if this be necessary for the removal of any false interpretation of their acts.[27]

51. In the same instruction further directions are given, as was also the case in Manchukuo, with regard to funerals, mar-

27. Cf. *AAS*, XXVIII (1936), 406-9.

riages, and other private rites in use in the social life of Japan. Catholics may join in these rites, which are now, through circumstances of place and by common opinion, mere indications of politeness and mutual affection.

52. It is significant that Propaganda prefaces the whole instruction by recalling to the missionaries an important document, issued as long ago as 1659 by the same Propaganda, in which it is said: "Make no effort and use no influence to make these people change their rites, habits, and customs, unless they are in evident contradiction to faith and morals."[28]

53. The next step in the development was to extend the regulations laid down for Manchukuo and Japan to China. On December 8, 1939, Propaganda issued a further "Instruction regarding Certain Ceremonies and the Oath on the Chinese Rites."[29] On the basis of repeated declarations by the Chinese government, the instruction points out, the cult of Confucius is at present day to be regarded not as a religious ceremony, but rather as a mere civic manifestation of regard for Confucius and for the cultural traditions rightly dear to every Chinese.

54. In four limpid declarations are laid down the logical consequences of this change of ideas. It is licit for Catholics to be present at the commemorative functions held before a likeness or tablet of Confucius, to place his image in Catholic schools and to make the ceremonial bow to it. It is likewise licit for Catholic functionaries and students to assist, if ordered to do so, at public ceremonies which bear some semblance of superstition, provided that, in accordance with canon 1258, they remain passive and participate only in such outward marks of respect as may be regarded as purely civil in character. And lastly, inclinations of the head and other signs of civil respect in presence of the dead or before their images are regarded as licit and proper.

55. In view of the changed circumstances, the Holy See furthermore dispensed all priests, whether in China or the adja-

28. The document is contained in *Collectanea S. Congregationis de Propaganda Fide* (Rome, 1907), I, 130-41.

29. Cf. *AAS*, XXXII (1940), 24-26.

cent countries, from the oath on Chinese Rites which since 1742 had been required as an essential preliminary to the exercise of their ministry. On April 9, 1940 the oath on the Malabar Rites in India, which had been imposed in 1744, was likewise abolished.

56. The *Fides News Service,* a semi-official organ of Propaganda, in discussing the instruction of December, 1939, points out that the action taken by the Church is in no way to be interpreted as a reflection on the past or a new judgment on the historical question of the Chinese Rites. In fact, the prohibition to discuss this question remains in full force.[30] The new decisions simply take cognizance of the fact that customs and ideas in the Orient have changed. It is not the Church, but the Orient which has changed its attitude towards those rites. The Church based her decision, we have seen, primarily on the official pronouncements of the civil authorities, who declared that their *sole* motives and intentions were to instill into their subjects sentiments of loyalty and devotion to country and national traditions. And in the instructions issued for China and Japan we read that it is "a matter of common knowledge" and "the common estimation of cultured persons" that the rites have lost their one-time religious character. In these phrases the Church voices the opinion prevalent among missionaries and, we make bold to say, among educated Chinese and Japanese.

57. The new decisions issued by the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda will prove, we trust, a turning point in the missionary development of the Far East[31] and an encouragement for other mission fields to follow a similar policy. They are a perfect illustration of valid and legitimate accommodation and a new proof of the Church's intentions to carry on the great tradition to be "all things to all men," Christian and pagan alike. And it was not by accident, we would like to believe, that Pope Pius XII, almost simultaneously with the issuance of the above instructions, in *Summi Pontificatus,* his first Encyclical Letter to

30. *Fides News Service,* Rome, Dec. 23, 1939, No. 713, NE 265/3.

31. Thus the *Osservatore Romano,* Dec. 18-19, 1939. For a more detailed discussion of these significant recent decisions cf. G. Voss, S.J., "Missionary Accommodation and Ancestral Rites in the Far East," *Theological Studies,* IV (1943), 542-54.

the world, speaks in unmistakable terms of the Church's unchanged attitude to foreign peoples and cultures:

> The Church of Christ, the faithful depository of the teaching of divine wisdom, cannot and does not think of depreciating or disdaining the particular characteristics which each people with jealous and intelligible pride cherishes and retains as a precious heritage. Her aim is a supernatural union in all-embracing love, deeply felt and practiced, and not the unity which is exclusively external and superficial and, by that very fact, weak. . . .
>
> She has repeatedly shown in her missionary enterprises that such a principle of action is the guiding star of her universal apostolate. Pioneer research and investigation, involving sacrifice, devotedness and love on the part of her missionaries of every age, have been undertaken in order to facilitate a deeper appreciative insight into the most varied civilizations and to put their spiritual values to account for a living and vital preaching of the Gospel of Christ. All that in such usages and customs is not inseparably bound up with religious errors will always be subject to kindly consideration, and, when it is found possible, will be sponsored and developed.
>
> Our immediate Predecessor of holy and venerated memory, applying such norms to a particularly delicate question, made some generous decisions which are a monument to his insight and to the intensity of his apostolic spirit. Nor need We tell you, Venerable Brethren, that We intend to proceed without hesitation along this way. Those who enter the Church, whatever be their origin or their speech, must know that they have equal rights as children in the house of the Lord, where the law of Christ and the peace of Christ prevail.[32]

32. *AAS*, XXXI (1939), 548f.

3.
The Theology of Accommodation

58. This missionary accommodation, of which we have traced a rough history, is not a mere tactical maneuver, not just expediency or compromise, but is deeply rooted in dogmatic foundations. It is demanded by the very essence of Christianity as willed by God.

59. Christianity is the sublime, divine answer to man's search and passionate yearning after God. God spoke to man, sending "His only-begotten Son, that those who believe in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting" (John 3:16). This revelation in and through Christ is God's final answer that marks the end of all human questions. Given for all times and to all men, mankind must accept it in obedience to faith.[33]

60. The task, then, of the Church is, by the help of the Holy Spirit, to translate into the manifold dialects of the various nations this answer which God first spoke intelligibly to the Jews through the mouth of Christ. The missionary is the bearer and "translator" of this answer. He must make Christ understandable to all nations, must, consequently, study and understand and speak the "language" of the people of his mission—not only their spoken language, but even more the language of their heart and soul, the language of their religious and cultural concepts.

Accommodation to Cultural Traditions

61. This demands accommodation to the cultural setting of the missionary people. Christianity is not given to an abstract

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33. Cf. J. A. Otto, S.J., *Kirche im Wachsen. Vierhundert Jahre Jesuitenorden in Dienste der Weltmission* (Freiburg: Herder, 1940). Otto gives on pp. 19-30 an excellent exposition of the principles of accommodation. In the present section, as also in the next, I borrow extensively from Otto. Some paragraphs are lifted almost bodily from his book, since, however, the translation is not literal and the contents are often only briefly summarized, quotation marks have been omitted.

humanity, and the missionary task is not the establishment of the Church in an empty space, but in a nation definitely molded by the impress of race and topography, history and the instinctive craving for culture. In accordance with the creative will of God, mankind has developed into various racial and national composites, and as each individual is a thought of God, each nation with its racial qualities, special aptitudes, and cultural attainments is a particular revelation of God, of His goodness, bounty, and beauty, a manifestation, imperfect though it may be, of His divine perfections (Rom. 1:19-20). The Church cannot but show reverence and respect for the works of God. She must fit the divine work of redemption unaltered into the divine work of creation, for the Redeemer did not come to destroy that which as Creator He had called into existence.

62. The creative work of God, however, was spoiled by man. Nature was tainted with original sin. There is evil and sin and death. The grace of redemption must destroy all that is evil and sinful, resurrect that which is dead; but it will not lend itself to the destruction of the good that still remains.

63. Mission work, therefore, is not simply a new creation. It is only the application of redemption—the redemption of what is evil in nature and contrary to God's original purpose, but the redemption also of all that still is good and wise and truly human in all men, not only regardless of their varied accidental cultures, but specifically according to these cultures wherever they place no hindrance to the messenger of Christ; for it is the wedding of a natural gift of God with the supernatural gift of the same God—nature and grace cooperating according to the theological axiom of *gratia non destruit sed complet et perficit naturam.*

64. "Christianity, as no other religion, evokes life in its entire extent and fullness, accepting it to bless it. It regards nothing that exists as contemptible or insignificant."[34] Purged, when necessary, of their pagan degeneracy, all the national traits and customs can be assumed by the Church. They must be redeemed,

34. O. Karrer, *Religions of Mankind*, trans. E. I. Watkin (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1936), p. 214.

however, regenerated, and supernaturally transformed; for the fact of elevation alone gives them true divine value. But thus redeemed and sanctified, they are a precious gift of the nations to God. Any other attitude towards them would be a depreciation of nature and a misunderstanding of original sin—that tragic heritage of the Lutheran-Calvinistic "reformation" which finds in nature only depravation and total apostasy from God. We might even go a step further and say that a denial and rejection of values not specifically Christian would involve a dualistic Manichaeism of an evil creator-god and a good redeemer-god and would thus entail not only the destruction of nature, but also of grace and Christianity.

65. A further consideration might help fully to understand the adaptability of Christianity. In discussing accommodation we must keep in mind the important fundamental distinction between Christianity in its objective contents, the *depositum fidei,* and the assimilation and expression of this objective reality in the outward forms and signs of piety. The objective faith as crystallized in Christian dogma—Trinity, creation, grace, original sin, redemption, the Church, and the like—is absolutely independent of any racial, cultural, or national factors and circumstances. It is of metaphysical, universal value. Its external expressions, however,—religiousness as distinct from religion—is subject to outside influences. They are definitely molded in their accidental aspects by heredity, environment, and history, and, consequently, dependent on regional peculiarities and the varying conditions of changing times. Take, for instance, the exuberant and profuse display of piety in southern Italy and contrast it with the quieter and much more restrained forms of devotion in northern Europe. It would seem obvious that such external forms of piety by which one people grasps and lives the objective Christianity cannot, or at best can rarely, be transplanted into a foreign soil.

66. This fact, often disregarded, explains the possibility and necessity of missionary accommodation. Those who have a merely one-sided view of Christianity and resolve it into a purely personal and subjective religiousness—a most dangerous tendency

in Protestantism—are necessarily led to surrender the universal validity of the Faith. But the danger for those who overstress the objective aspect of the Faith is just as apparent. They mistake the expression of their own personal faith and devotion for the only valid and universally binding expression of Christianity and are thus opposed to all accommodation as to a surrender of vital and essential Christian elements. Both sides misconceive the true nature of the Faith. Christianity as willed by God is both: static and immutable in its objective content, but at the same time alive in its dynamic reality, and thus capable of being received and expressed by the human mind of whatever race and culture.

67. It follows, therefore, by way of a corollary, that Hilaire Belloc's categorical statement that Europe is the Faith and the Faith is Europe[35] cannot be accepted without qualification; for Belloc fails to make this very distinction between the objective essence of the deposit of Faith and its subjective expression in the continent of Europe. His unreserved equation characterizes at best the *de facto*, never the *de jure* situation. As Jacques Maritain points out: "Our culture is Graeco-Latin, our religion is not. The Church adopted such a culture, but she did not subordinate herself to it."[36] She can never, if she wants to be faithful to her universal mission, be bound to this one particular culture, no matter how great the service this culture has rendered for the development of Christian learning and the shaping of Christian worship. She cannot be bound to any culture, "not even to culture in general and its various forms otherwise than as a transcendent and independent vivifying force."[37] Maritain's qualifying remarks, therefore, regarding Belloc's thesis that Europe is the Faith and the Faith is Europe are quite correct. He writes:

> If Mr. Hilaire Belloc means that Europe would be nothing without the Faith and that its *raison d'etre* has been and remains to dispense the Faith to the world, Mr. Belloc is right in saying that Europe is the

35. H. Belloc, *Europe and the Faith* (New York: The Paulist Press, 1920), p. 261.
36. J. Maritain, *The Things That Are Not Caesar's* (New York: Scribner, 1931), p. 105.
37. J. Maritain, "Religion and Culture," *Essays in Order* ed. Chr. Dawson and J. F. Burns (New York: Macmillan, 1931), p. 31.

> Faith. But speaking absolutely, no! Europe is not the Faith and the Faith is not Europe: Europe is not the Church and the Church is not Europe. Rome is not the capital of the Latin world. Rome is the capital of the world. *Urbs caput orbis.* The Church is universal because she is born of God, all nations are at home in her, the arms of her crucified Master are stretched above all races, above all civilizations. She does not bring nations *the benefits of civilization,* but the Blood of Christ and supernatural Beatitude.[38]

Accommodation to Non-Christian Religions

68. Accommodation is valid also with regard to non-Christian religions. To understand this fully, we must preface this consideration by recalling, first of all, the irreconcilable opposition between Christianity and any pagan religion. Between them lies a chasm which cannot be filled in nor bridged over, but only narrowed down.

69. Christianity is something unique and something essentially new. Its supremacy is absolute. It is not just a more perfect religion, and not just the most perfect development of religion up to the present. It is the absolute religion, because "God who of old spoke . . . at sundry times and in divers manners has in these days spoken in His Son" (Hebr. 1:1), has revealed Himself in Christ and thus manifested Himself in so far as "He who dwells in light inaccessible" (Tim. 6:16) can be manifested to men. The actuality, unity, absoluteness, and universality of Christianity are founded on this unique, historical, supernatural, and all-embracing act of God by which He speaks to every individual, every nation, every age through Christ the Word made flesh, without whom "no man cometh to the Father."

70. Paganism, on the other hand, is in the main the result of the puzzling and brooding intellect of man. To build upon it as on a foundation—even if it were monotheistic in content—and to develop and transform it into Christianity, would be

38. J. Maritain, *The Things That Are Not Caesar's*, pp. 94f.

tantamount to founding the true religion, God's word and work of redemption, upon an imperfect and often erroneous product of the human mind. Never, therefore, in the strict sense of the word, can Christianity be considered as the "fulfillment" of paganism.

71. But although Christianity is not the fulfillment of the pagan religions, it is the fulfillment of the search of the pagan world after God. Paganism, despite its errors and distortions and moral depravations—and as such an object of God's wrath and deserving of His anger (Eph. 2:4)—is not infrequently also a passionate yearning for redemption, that quest for the "Unknown God" of which St. Paul once spoke so eloquently to the Athenians "that they should seek God, and perhaps grope after Him, and find Him" (Acts 17:27). The reason is that many pagan religions still contain and are pregnant with human and divine truths in virtue of which alone they can endure.[39]

72. It may be hard to decide whether in all cases these finer elements of paganism are the product of the higher flight of the human mind, or whether they are remnants of a supernatural primitive revelation. But we do find elements which according to God's providence have been transmitted "by sages, priests, prophets and gurus and by the doctrine and worship, the sacrifices, prayers and hymns of religious communities,"[40] and which are in conformity with the divine and natural law. Thus paganism remains chained to God, in an eternal restlessness that emanates from the depths of the individual soul as well as from the reflective consciousness of the people as a whole, manifesting itself in continually new shapes and colors according to the many different racial, social, and historical forms of mankind.

73. The Church, recognizing the positive religious values of these religions, must in dealing with them be guided by the words of the Apostle: "What you worship in ignorance, that I proclaim to you" (Acts 17:23). The missionary, therefore, will, after the manner of St. Paul, cultivate the seeds which the divine Logos plants in the pagan soil. He will

39. Cf. J. H. Newman, *The Arians of the Fourth Century*, pp. 79f.
40. O. Karrer, *Religions of Mankind*, p. 240.

> . . . seek some points in the existing superstitions as the basis of his own instructions, instead of indiscriminately condemning and discarding the whole assemblage of heathen opinions and practices; and he will address his hearers, not as men in a state of actual perdition, but as being in imminent danger of "the wrath to come," because they are in bondage and ignorance . . . And while he strenuously opposes all that is idolatrous, immoral, and profane in their creed, he will profess to be leading them on to perfection, and to be recovering and purifying, rather than reversing the essential principles of their belief.[41]

74. We have stressed above the absolute originality of the Church as a supernatural institution. However essential it is to insist on this originality, it may not be overstressed or taken to mean that Christianity can in no way "receive" or "adopt" from paganism. "The Church is original and absolutely new in its content, but not in its form. Neither Christ nor the Church has, properly speaking, invented new forms."[42] On the contrary, the Church has adopted, as we have seen, a great many forms and rites, even from pagan rituals, because they were at bottom truly human, true and good. And Christianity has received many contributions from Plato, Aristotle, and other pagan philosophers, because truth is truth in any—even any pagan—system. To preserve, perfect, and sanctify what is good and true and human does not militate against the originality and uniqueness of Christianity; for all genuine truth and goodness belong to it by divine right. The Church can and must claim them as her inheritance.

75. The Church is the Mystical Body of Christ. Any organism must have the power of adaption if it is to remain vital and not become petrified and fossilized. The Church, too, must have this power. She must be of every age and every people, and every age and every people must bring all their riches to her: riches which without her have no supernatural value.

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41. J. H. Newman, *The Arians of the Fourth Century*, p. 84.

42. J. Pinsk, *Christianity and Race*, trans. C. M. R. Bonacina (Essays in Order, New Series: No. 2; New York: Sheed and Ward, 1936), pp. 58f.

Accommodation Not Syncretism

76. Such accommodation has nothing in common with syncretism. Syncretism is the act or system of blending and reconciling inharmonious elements, or, as applied to the present discussion, the fusion of various religious forms and views into one.

77. History shows that Catholicism never fused with pagan religions. It never compromised with polytheism, never surrendered any of its dogmatic and moral teachings. Nor did it assume any pagan beliefs and practices that were at variance with its deposit of faith. This tenacious adherence to her own tradition, this rigidly uncompromising attitude, has won for the Church the epithet of intolerance. The Church is proud of it, knowing that the teaching of Christ does not admit dogmatic tolerance. To explain then, as Harnack does, the rapid expansion of the Church through all the countries of Europe as the result of syncretistic tendencies is an historical misconception of what actually happened.[43]

78. The spread and development of Buddhism in India and the countries of the Far East have often been compared with the success of Christianity in Europe. The lesson we are supposed to learn is, of course, that both are syncretistic. Buddhism, it is true, did expand rapidly. It soon became the official cult of the greater part of the Far East and thus the carrier, if not to a certain extent the mother, of Oriental culture. For many centuries it assumed the role of the *alma mater* of the East, under whose instruction and guidance countries like China, Burma, Korea and Japan attained maturity. There are, then, certain similarities with regard to the results of Buddhist and Christian missionary zeal. Both exercised a far-reaching and lasting influence on the life of the nations they converted to themselves. But there stands out, among others, one very prominent difference. Buddhism in its spread over Asia surrendered many of its specific Buddhist characteristics.

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43. A. Harnack, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* (4th ed.; Leipzig: Hinrich, 1924), I, 324-31; *Das Wesen des Christentums* (4th ed.; Leipzig: Hinrich, 1901), pp. 123 ff.

79. From the very beginning Buddhism lacked consistency. At times it appeared as atheism, then as pantheism, and again as theism. Its different schools and sects owe their phenomenal success primarily to their adaptability to changing exigencies and needs, an adaptability which included an accommodation not only to different cultural settings, but above all an accommodation to, and fusion with, heterogeneous philosophies, religious cults, and moral convictions. As a result, Buddhism today is no longer the Buddhism of Gautama Buddha, but rather "a syncretism of his ethics of deliverance and the medley of religious beliefs which Buddhist comprehensiveness has assimilated."[44] It is correct to say that Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, was not a Buddhist.

80. There is no trace of any such syncretistic growth in Catholicism. The Church was neither indulgent nor indifferent to pagan beliefs. She was indulgent and indifferent, at times, only to pagan rites and practices, in so far as these were merely accidental, that is, linked up not with paganism as such but with the racial and cultural traditions of a people. The admission of the truly human and natural into religion, and the endowment of religion with ceremonies that flow spontaneously from the condition of our human nature are not syncretism. Syncretism is had only in the adoption of elements taken from another cult that still retain their alien characteristics and are, so to speak, still possessed of the soul of the pagan cult.[45]

81. Such elements the Church never tolerated. She adopted only those she was certain were not (or were no longer) part of the essential make-up of a foreign cult, and these, moreover, she did not permit in the inner sanctuary of Catholicism. They were admitted only into the precincts and remained exclusively on the periphery. The genuine character of Christ's teaching, the entire content of God's revelation were preserved in immaculate integrity. Catholicism, in spite of all accommodation and adaptation and assimilation, remained what it had always been: Catholicism pure and undiluted.

44. O. Karrer, *Religions of Mankind*, p. 51.

45. A. Pirngruber, S.J., "Synkretismus," *Stimmen aus Maria Laach*, LXXXVII (1914), 271.

4.

The Present Need of Accommodation

82. Accommodation, we hope to have shown, is fully justified on theological grounds as a sound missionary technique. It is in accord with Christianity as willed by God, and even demanded by the very essence of the Faith as a universally binding religion sent to all nations. And if it is justified, then its employment is imperative in many missionary countries today as virtually the only efficient means to the end.

Accommodation A Missiological Necessity

83. With the awakening of more pronounced national feelings all over the world, accompanied by a realization of the intrinsic values of indigenous cultural traditions, many missionary countries, especially in the Far East, resent the undisguised Europeanism that, on the whole, has characterized missionary efforts ever since the beginning of the colonial expansion of Europe. Missionaries are no longer welcome, precisely because they are regarded as apostles of Western thought and civilization. Many of the intellectual elite reject Christianity outright, not so much because they object to its essential religious and moral tenets, but because they refuse its accidental Western features. To them Christ's religion is merely the religion of the Western world. Bowing to Him is submitting, if not to the conqueror's yoke, at least to the foreigner's culture, which they consider unconformable to their own traditions. They oppose Christianity as an apparently "foreign religion which supplants indigenous cultures and transforms each people into a sort of spiritual colony of Europe."[46]

84. This holds true especially in regard to countries that can claim a highly advanced culture and civilization of their own.

46. J. C. Menasce, "Native Culture and the Missions," *Commonweal*, XXXV (1942), 505.

They look askance at the prospect of being "civilized" by the West.

> The Chinese were civilized long before the Europeans and Americans; and they know it. It was they who civilized the Japanese; and they have not forgotten it. Besides their civilization, the Chinese have their own culture peculiar to them, which likewise is very ancient and very elevated. *A priori,* therefore, the pretence of bringing to them the benefits of *civilization* and *culture* was doomed to failure and likely to infuriate them . . . It was the fear and horror of having the *culture* of the foreigner imposed upon them against their will, of seeing their national culture replaced by an alien one, that turned the Chinese first against the Protestant schools, the American especially, which formerly were highly esteemed. They produced yellow Yankees! It is the same fear—and this is worse—which next excited them against Christianity which formerly, if not loved, was at least tolerated and even respected.[47]

85. Such reactionary forces are a genuine challenge to the Church to prove herself as a wise teacher and true mother of all races and nations. This is seen to be all the more important when we consider that, as most missiologists agree today, the formal object or aim of the missionary enterprise is not just the salvation of individual souls, but their salvation through the establishment of the Church Visible in missionary lands.[48]

86. In working towards this goal, the Church, consequently, must address herself not only to the individual, but to the people as a whole, to its soul, its law, its specific character as a people. She must take into consideration the fundamental inclinations and attitudes of the collective religious, social, moral and cultural life as it has gradually taken concrete form in the nation. And she must recognize, besides, the dependence of the individual on the collective national character. Although we do not wish to subscribe unconditionally to the thesis "that the vocation of

47. L. Wieger, S.J., "La Chine actuelle," *Etudes,* CXCI (1927), 20.

48. Cf. the definition of missions as given by E. L. Murphy, S.J., "The Purpose of Missions," *The Missionary Academia,* I (1943-1944), No. 2, pp. 8ff.

Christ went forth to the 'nations,' and that it is through their nationality, and therefore with due regard to their specifically racial character, that the Church in her teaching and in her liturgy seeks to incorporate individuals as members of the kingdom of Christ," we do hold that "not only the individual *ego*, but also the racial *ego*, has its place in the scheme of salvation."[49]

87. In the early days of the Church, this adaptability to racial and national characteristics, as we have seen, was a truly dynamic force. But then Christianity was still an undeveloped seed—the mustard seed that was to grow and become a large tree (Luke 13:19). This seed, planted in the cultural soil of the Graeco-Roman world, drew from it abundant nourishment which, by God's providence, helped to support it in life. It readily adapted itself to its surroundings and became, to all outward appearances, a home-grown Western tree. Mission work, today, is no longer sowing the mustard seed. Today it is not an undeveloped seed, but a full-grown shoot which must sink its roots into the cultural soil of the mission countries. Adaptation and acclimatization are, under circumstances like these, less easily accomplished. For Christianity must break the fixed and compact form into which it has grown, must sever many of the ties that bind it to its past.

88. The pagan nations, on the other hand, have to accept in addition to the teachings of Christ a variety of human features and peculiarities, and these steeped in a Western dye.[50] Many of these, we admit, are inseparably linked to Christianity as willed by God; but others are just accidental. They are only of particular, and not of universal, human value. To strip Christianity of these merely accidental elements, when helpful and allowable in deference to the indigenous culture of the locality, seems to be of the innermost essence of all missionary efforts that are to be truly Catholic.

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49. Thus writes K. Adam in his preface to H. Franke, *The Salvation of the Nations*, trans. Canon G. Smith (London: Coldwell, 1938), p. 8.

50. J. A. Otto, S.J., "Kirche und Kulturen," *Stimmen der Zeit*. CXXXVII (1940), 356.

The Scope of Accommodation

89. The logical question that presents itself immediately is this: what are these accidental elements, or in other words, what is the scope of accommodation?

90. Father Väth, whom we have followed in tracing the history of accommodation, makes a threefold distinction. He distinguishes between the essence of Christianity, its external form, and its garb. By the essence he understands everything that is derived from divine revelation, as the *depositum fidei*, the moral law, the essentials of the Eucharistic celebration and of the sacraments, and the fundamental features of the Church's constitution and law. The exterior form, according to him, comprises the constitution of the Church and Canon Law in so far as they are not of divine origin but of ecclesiastical institution; scholastic philosophy; ecclesiastical forms of worship according to the Roman tradition; and Latin as the liturgical language and the conceptional medium of dogma. The garb, finally, comprises all the other features that make up the external appearance of the Church, as for instance the attitude of the missionary to the people of his mission, the means and methods of Christian instruction, various institutions of social work and Christian charity, non-liturgical religious celebrations and popular devotions, ecclesiastical art and architecture, and certain popular customs and civil institutions that make up part and parcel of the life of the individual in his concrete circumstances.[51]

91. The essence of Christianity, as is obvious, cannot be bound to any race or nations and admits, therefore, of no accommodation. The cultural garb, on the other hand, is a human and, consequently, accidental development, and although it gave to Christianity a definite shape and physiognomy, it is not of metaphysical or universal value, but admits changes and modifications. It is this cultural garb which is the primary subject of accommodation.

As to the exterior form, although it is not of divine institution, Father Väth is very reluctant to admit accommodation.

51. Cf. A. Väth, *op. cit.*, pp. 149ff.

> A transformation of this form for the purpose of accommodation to the cultures of the Far Eastern peoples—the only ones to come under consideration—would be possible. Had Christianity in the years of the early Church been propagated in China, it certainly would have acquired Chinese features. In the Near East such a development has taken place. However, under the guidance of providence, this did not happen to any great extent, but the missionary Church found her first homestead in the Occidental milieu, and she stepped into the Far Eastern world only after she had fully matured. Still, ecclesiastical authorities could permit and authorize accommodation. But would that be of advantage, or would it not rather give rise to many difficulties in preserving the unity and purity of Faith?[52]

92. We are inclined to take a less strict view as regards this external form of Christianity. Although aware that a great many reasons speak for retaining Latin as the liturgical language and the Latin rite as the expression of liturgical worship, we can conceive of instances, particularly in the Far East, where accommodation in this regard might facilitate the missionary task. Granting the guidance of Divine Providence in their adoption into the Latin church and the great service that the Latin language and liturgy have undoubtedly rendered as a strong unifying force, they are still human in origin and therefore accidental, and thus not of absolute binding force for all times and all men. The reference to the Eastern churches, though perhaps not an absolutely valid comparison, is of no small interest. The Eastern churches have their own liturgical languages and rites and, moreover, in many instances their own ecclesiastical law,[53] and Ecclesiastical authorities in Rome have been, in times past and present, very outspoken against any latinizing attempts from within or from without. Grave reasons, similar to those that speak for the retention of those differences by the Eastern churches, might one day suggest the advisability of extending them to certain mis-

52. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

53. Cf. *CIC*, c. 1; in recent years a Commission has been appointed to complete the codification of the law for the Oriental Church. Cf. *AAS*, XXVII (1935), 306.

sionary churches. In the light of the history of accommodation, and on the strength of the theological arguments, we must, it seems, admit not only the abstract possibility of accommodation in this regard, but also its advisability should sufficiently urgent reasons seem to demand it.

93. As to scholastic philosophy, a similar comment could be made. Father Väth rightly remarks that it is impossible to make Eastern philosophy the basis of dogma, because it would result in an amalgamation of error and truth. But not everything in Eastern philosophy is erroneous, just as not everything in pagan religion is idolatrous; and accommodation would not seek to make Eastern philosophy, as such, the basis of dogma in preference to, or to the exclusion of, the traditional scholastic philosophy. The Church cannot and need not renounce her philosophical inheritance, because the principles contained in it are universally true and must be found underlying any true philosophy wherever found. Moreover, many of her dogmas are expressed in philosophical terms and concepts of the *philosophia perennis*. Nicea, Ephesus, Chalcedon, and other councils used concepts of Greek provenance (*omoousious, natura, persona*), and Trent described justification in terms of the Aristotelian pattern of four causes. The East will have to recite with us in common the *Quicumque* which is replete with Western concepts of philosophy. But all this does not preclude an Eastern system of philosophy from one day offering its services to prepare the Oriental mind for the reception of Christianity and its dogmas.

94. In recent years an interesting attempt has been made that might exemplify the role a native philosophy may legitimately play. Father Johannes, S.J., and his associates in Calcutta have published the *Light of the East Series*

> . . . in which they explain how a transition is possible, nay logically inevitable, from the Vedanta, the traditional philosophy of India, to Christianity. . . . These absolutely up-to-date apologists do not wear, as Robert de Nobili once did, the garments of the Brahmin, but they have devised instead a psychol-

> ogy which is as subtle as you like, absolutely Thomist and yet Bengali.[54]

The missionary, then, can be in cordial agreement with the Hindu Christian who opened his mission to his fellow countrymen with the declaration:

> I will be careful not to wound my countrymen's self-respect by saying to them, "Your scriptures are pure nonsense. There is nothing of any value outside the Old and New Testaments." On the contrary, I will often appeal to the ancient sages, teachers and books of my heathen compatriots, placing them in the light of Christ and conversing with them in His Spirit.[55]

95. But the Eastern systems of philosophy need not be just an introduction or stepping stone to the *philosophia perennis;* they may even be called upon by Divine Providence to make their own special contributions to Christian philosophy; for we hold, as Cardinal Newman points out, "that one special way in which Providence has imparted divine knowledge to us has been by enabling her [the Church] to draw and collect it out of the world."[56] Thus far the Church has drawn and collected knowledge out of the West. She is now looking towards the East.

> . . . it is evident on first principles that the possibilities of the future are very far from exhausted. In two thousand years of her existence the Church has assimilated many different systems. And it needs no prophet to convince us of what we are assured by Christian faith, that she is capable of assimilating other systems in the millenia to come. For example, in the opinion of qualified students the ethics of Confucius or the metaphysics of Vedanta require little more purification than Aristotle required to be made Christian . . . and when they have consented in the East to employ the native philsophical schools for the same service which our traditional philosophies

54. Thus Vallée Poussin, the outstanding historian of Buddhism, as quoted by J. Maritain, *The Angelic Doctor*, trans. J. F. Scanlan (New York: The Dial Press), pp. 92-94.

55. O. Karrer, *Religions of Mankind*, p. 226.

56. J. H. Newman, *Essays, Critical and Historical* (London: Pickering, 1871), II, 232.

> have rendered in the West, then a Christian humanity will at last have been realized on a vast scale, the visible realization on earth of the one world-wide Kingdom of God over mankind, the *Ecclesia Sancta Catholica,* Catholic indeed in her universal comprehensiveness, the fulfillment of Christ's prayer "that they all may be one."[57]

96. In conclusion, then, it may be said that such accommodation to the exterior forms of Christianity as concretized in language, rite, law, and philosophy, cannot be called impossible, nor absolutely inadvisable. The principles that must guide any such attempt seem to be valid and clear, although they would present, we admit, a serious and difficult task in their application.

97. Accommodation to the cultural garb, which is the first and more direct goal, will be much more easily accomplished. But even here no particular and universally valid details can be given. They must be decided in a given territory for given circumstances. The history of accommodation can serve as a sure guide; but the task requires a thorough knowledge of the particular mission field in question, and, besides, a sure grasp of the principles that govern the practice of accommodation. It likewise calls for a native clergy and hierarchy who by birth, mentality, feelings, and inclinations are in close touch with their own people and who thus better than anyone else know the way to their hearts.[58] But it will require, above all, ecclesiastical leadership with prudent initiative and firm determination to inspire and guide the missionaries, check extravagances, and keep accommodation within the bounds of orthodox channels.

Accommodation and Europeanism Today

98. Accommodation, we have seen, is not the surrender of any essential element in Christianity. Neither does it imply, as might perhaps be inferred, an unconditional surrender of all the cultural and material achievements which the West in cooperation with, and often under the motherly guidance of, the Church

57. O. Karrer, *Religions of Mankind,* pp. 224f., 228.
58. Cf. the Apostolic Letter of Benedict XV, *Maximum Illud, AAS,* XI (1919), 445.

has attained. We should never forget that the best forces of Europe and America are embodied in Christianity. They have been enlisted by Divine Providence to further and develop the Christian *gnosis*. To suggest that these forces should be suppressed or, what is equivalent, that Western Christianity in its God-willed Western form has no particular mission to fulfill in the Christianizing of the world, would be a serious error. As Jacques Maritain rightly points out:

> Let it not be thought that she [the Church] will ever abandon the superior virtues which she herself produced out of the Hellenic and Latin culture. If she made such an extensive use of that culture, the very simple explanation still holds good; like ancient Hebraism in the order of revelation, that culture has received from Providence in the order of reason a privilege which it would be shameful to deny; it is the only culture in which human reason nearly succeeded. There was therefore nothing exceptional in its providing the supernatural life of the Church with choice human means.[59]

99. The missionary Church cannot and will not forsake this priceless inheritance of choice human means, nor the grandeur of her historical past. In the course of nineteen hundred years, theologians and philosophers, scholars and artists, saints and mystics have produced riches that are of more than mere temporal or regional value. The missionary countries, even in the Far East, have no intention of repudiating these attainments. They welcome the material achievements of our civilization, and they are eager to learn. But what they want is a synthesis of Western intellectual and material attainments with the revered heritage of their own cultural past. What Archbishop Yu-Pin of Nanking recently had to say with regard to China holds true likewise for many other nations. In eulogizing Father Matteo Ricci, he points out that his method of approach

> . . . consisted not simply in appreciation and respect for Chinese culture, but also in satisfaction of

59. J. Maritain, *The Things That Are Not Caesar's*, pp. 103f.

> the intellectual needs of the Chinese people. The latter, though attached to the genuine values of their traditional culture, were and still are eager for universal truth—eager to add Western science and philosophy to their own patrimony of spiritual values. Ricci and his companions were glad to slake the thirst for natural truth, knowing full well that natural wisdom leads onward and upward to the very throne of the Lord of Heaven Himself.[60]

100. The Christian West still has its mission to fulfill: to dispense the Faith to the world—the faith not in its initial embryonic stage, but in its mature vigor, enriched and perfected, as it were, by the wisdom of two milleniums of human progress and development. Any other attitude would mean retrogression and lead to stagnation. True missionary accommodation will be mindful of this historical vocation of the West, but will be mindful, too, of the limitations inherent in not a few Western forms and expressions that are only accidental to Christianity. In so far as these cannot be fitted into the cultural setting of a given missionary country, they must be surrendered, or rather exchanged for indigenous forms and expressions that have been born and developed in the native soil; but in so far as these European forms are welcome and acceptable, they will dispose the pagan mind to accept Christianity and will, furthermore, help to advance and refine human living, which is quite in accord with the cultural mission of the Church.

Advantages of Accommodation

101. Accommodation, it would seem to follow from the foregoing study, is a most successful, and often the only, way by which Christianity can ever come to grips with the non-Christian world. It paves the way for the acceptance of the Faith, aiming, as it does, not just at the conversion of the individual, but primarily at the conversion of whole nations. And whole nations, in periods of the greatest missionary successes, did surrender to the yoke of Christ, because the Church in her accommodation-

60. Archbishop Paul Yu-Pin, "Recall to Tradition in the Chinese Missions," *America*, LXIX (1943), 341.

mindedness had made it less burdensome and more acceptable. If history repeats itself, as it is said to do, then we may look forward to a similar success, provided we follow the wisdom of the Church and become like her, through the all-welcoming spirit of accommodation, "all things to all men."

102. But there are other advantages. Accommodation will show its beneficial results not only in missionary statistics. It will contribute, we trust, not only to the enriching of the nations through Christianity, but also to the enriching of Christianity through the nations (Apoc. 21:26).

> God gives to each race special aptitudes for the Gospel of Christ, and it is these specifically racial qualities that a converted nation puts at the service of the Gospel. They are the first fruits which the nation brings to Christ, and it is only this nation that can bring precisely these gifts. Herein we may see the admirable Catholicity of Christianity, which is able to grow and develop, not indeed as regards the essential nature which Christ once and for all bestowed upon it, but in the concrete form and physiognomy which it assumes in various nations and peoples. The divine and the human blend harmoniously together in the Church of Christ, whose grace-life does not suppress or destroy natural forms, but ennobles and perfects them, putting them at the service of the Gospel for the glory of Christ.[61]

103. The Church impatiently awaits the time when the non-Western world will come and offer its gifts. The creative powers of many an old and highly developed culture, once it has been "baptized," will bring to maturity seeds of wisdom as yet undeveloped and make old values shine forth resplendently in new shapes and colors. To quote Pope Pius XII:

> Nations, despite a difference of development, due to diverse conditions of life and culture, are not destined to break the unity of the human race, but rather to enrich and embellish it by the sharing of their own particular gifts, and by the reciprocal interchange of

61. H. Franke, *The Salvation of the Nation*, pp. 97f.

> goods which can be efficacious and possible only when a mutual love and a lively sense of charity unite all the sons of the same Father and all those redeemed by the same divine Blood.[62]

104. All nations, once their creative powers and gifts have been re-established in Christ (Eph. 1:10), can find in the Church not only a home, but also an opportunity to make their own special contributions; for Christianity is still capable of development, not in essentials, but in things accidental. No single civilization may keep the Christian spirit in the bondage of its own historical past. No one school of thought has an exclusive right to formulate the Christian message. Christianity is not committed exclusively to any one philosophy or civilization, social or cultural tradition, liturgy or rite, art or architecture. Whatever their origin, they are invited to take their rightful place in the further development of Christian life, and truth, and worship.

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62. *Summi Pontificatus, AAS*, XXXI (1939), 548. Cf. also note 32.

Study Outline

Gerald C. Treacy, S.J.

Part 1. Paragraphs 1-18

A world-religion's mission is not to gain just individual souls but each people, race and nation. By accommodation is meant a spirit of sympathy for all that "is natural, genuine and incorrupt," in the customs and habits of all peoples. "To be all things to all men" is the accommodation technique of the Catholic missionary.

Accommodation was practiced by the first missionaries, the Apostles. St. Peter and St. Paul showed this in refusing to impose upon the Gentile converts the practices of Judaism. St. Paul's example was followed by the early Apologists and Church Fathers. Terminology is a case in point. The Church retained but few words that bespoke her Jewish origin. She used the familiar terms of Greek and Latin literature. The current philosophy was likewise pressed into the service of the missionary conquest of the Graeco-Roman world. Plato and Aristotle were brought into the service of the Cross of Christ.

The same is true of pagan rites and customs. They were taken out of their pagan setting and brought into the sphere of liturgical and extra-liturgical worship. They were given a new Christian meaning. It is also true of pagan art. It was purified and made Christian. Adoption and adaptation was the policy. It was thus that the Church gradually fitted herself into the cultural pattern of the Roman Empire. She adopted the good, rejected the evil and adapted whatever was indifferent.

Questions

What is the mission of a world-religion?
What is included under the term of accommodation?
What is the purpose of accommodation?
How did St. Paul express the spirit of accommodation?
How did the Apostles show the spirit of accommodation?
What danger was averted by their policy?
How did the early Apologists and Church Fathers follow St. Paul's example?
What terminology did they employ?
What attitude was adopted toward pagan philosophy?
Why did the Montanists perish?
What was the Christian attitude toward pagan customs, symbols and art?

Part 2. Paragraphs 19-57

In the following centuries this cultural adaptation played a less conspicuous part, for as the Church reached maturity she had acquired a culture of her own. While the Church may be said to have received the Roman stamp, in civilizing the barbaric north she did not abandon the principle of missionary accommodation. St. Patrick, St. Augustine, St. Boniface prove that. Pope Gregory the Great in his instruction to St. Augustine gives the Magna Charta of missionary accommodation.

The Church did not take over pagan practices. The Church tolerated ancient customs, knowing that in time their pagan significance would be forgotten. She did not suppress national and racial characteristics but fostered them. The result has been a civilization that is Western and Christian.

During the years that witnessed the Christianization of Northern Europe the early Franciscans and Dominicans followed the principle of accommodation in their missionary apostolate. By the close of the Middle Ages the Church stood forth as a typically Western religion. When the era of European expansion and conquest began, the policy of accommodation was forgotten in many places.

The missions benefitted from the work of colonization. They suffered from it too. Both conquistador and missionary were zealous in suppressing not only heathen beliefs but native cultural traditions. The result was that the pagan was supposed to become a Westerner before becoming a Christian. A certain amount of accommodation did prevail however in Latin America and the Philippines. Ricci in China and de Nobili in India stand out as missionary exponents of accommodation. A number of new decrees issued between 1935 and 1940 have settled the policy of accommodation in the Far East.

Questions

Why was cultural adaptation less prominent in the centuries following the Middle Ages?

Why is the instruction of Pope Gregory the Great to St. Augustine famous?

Why were pagan customs allowed to remain in mission lands?

What was the final product of the Christianizing of Europe?

How did the early Franciscans and Dominicans practice accommodation?

What is meant by a narrow form of Europeanism in the mission field?

What was the attitude of the explorers and missionaries toward non-Europeans?

Missionary work benefitted and suffered from the colonizer. Explain.

How did the European superiority complex affect the missionary?

What was the policy of de Nobili in India and Ricci in China?

What has been the bearing of the recent decrees on the missions of the Far East?

Part 3. Paragraphs 58-81

Missionary accommodation is rooted in dogmatic foundations. Christianity is God's Word to all men. The task of the Church is to translate that Word into the many dialects of the various nations. The missionary is the bearer of this Message, and so must speak the language of his people, not only their word language, but the language of their heart and soul, the language of their religious concepts. This demands accommodation to the cultural setting of the people to whom the missionary is sent.

Mission work is the application of Redemption not only to what is evil in nature but to all that is good and human in all men. This application is made according to their various cultures. This is accommodation. Christianity is both objective and subjective. The *Depositum Fidei* is unchangeable. Its expression is changeable. It is affected by different cultures. Its expression in southern Italy is different from its expression in the arctic zone. This explains the need of missionary accommodation.

Christianity as willed by God is static and immutable in its objective content but alive in its dynamic reality, and so capable of being received and expressed by the human mind of every race and culture. The Church is not bound to any particular culture.

Christianity is not the fulfillment of paganism. It is the fulfillment of the search of the pagan soul for God. Paganism contains some good. The missionary will cultivate that good. The Church has adopted many forms from pagan rituals. The Church is of every age and every people, and every age and people bring their riches to her to be purified and elevated.

Accommodation has nothing in common with syncretism. For syncretism means the fusion of various religious forms into one. The Church has never assumed any pagan belief or practice at variance with the Deposit of Faith. The Church has been indulgent at times to pagan practices that were accidental.

Questions

Is accommodation merely a tactical maneuver?
The missionary must speak the language of the souls of his people. Explain.
Is mission work the redemption only of what is evil in nature?
What is the difference between religion and religiousness?
Christianity is both static and dynamic. Explain.
Of what is paganism the result?
Of what is Christianity the fulfillment?
May the Church adopt anything from paganism?
What is syncretism?
How did Buddhism spread?

Part 4. Paragraphs 82-104

The formal aim of missionary endeavor is the salvation of individual souls through the establishment of the Church in the mission field. In working toward this she must address herself to the people as a whole. Not the individual *ego* only but the racial *ego* has its place in the plan of salvation. This is the reason for accommodation.

The essence of Christianity admits of no accommodation. Its cultural garb does. It is the primary subject of accommodation. Accommodation does not imply a surrender of all the cultural achievements which the West in cooperation with the Church has attained. It does imply a mingling of the West with the East. Accommodation will contribute to the enriching of the nations through Christianity and the enriching of Christianity through the nations.

Questions

Why are missionaries not welcome in the East?
What is the formal aim of mission activity?
How does this affect mission strategy?
What was the dynamic force in the early days of the Church?
What is the scope of accommodation?
Does the *Depositum Fidei* admit of accommodation?
Can Eastern philosophy be made the basis of dogma?
Name some of the beneficial results of accommodation.
In what sense is Christianity still capable of development?

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